

# The Russian River Bulletin

Fall 2005

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## Mission Statement:

To facilitate communication, coordination, and cooperation on issues affecting the Russian River and its Watershed

## Chinook Salmon in the Russian River

By Shawn Chase and Sean White, Sonoma County Water Agency

Each year as the seasons change from summer to fall, Chinook salmon begin their annual migration up the Russian River to their natal spawning habitat. However, until quite recently, the Chinook run in the Russian was relatively unknown. Few people knew that Chinook inhabited the Russian and no one knew how many returned to the river annually. This all changed when the Sonoma County Water Agency began conducting research on the effects of its water diversion facilities on fish, and more importantly, ways to avoid impacting fish in the Russian River Basin. Much of this research stems from our Section 7 consultations (Endangered Species Act requirements) that the Agency has participated in with the National Marine Fisheries Service and the Army Corps of Engineers. This research has significantly increased our knowledge of Chinook salmon inhabiting the Russian River.

We reviewed historical documents on salmon and steelhead populations in the Russian River from 1880 to the present to try and determine if Chinook were native to the Russian River. The oldest re-

port mentioning Chinook salmon in the Russian River were stocking records from 1881. We also found reports from the late 1880's describing an in-river commercial fishery for "salmon" on the Russian River. However, the reports that specifically identified the catch as occurring in the river did not include the species captured (referring to the fish as "salmon"), and those that identified the fish as Chinook salmon did not specifically refer to the location of capture as the Russian River. The time of year that the commercial fishery operated

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was mentioned only once, when the fishery occurred between October and March. This time period overlaps the time of year when Chinook, coho, and steelhead are migrating in the river. Thus, all three of these species could have been captured in the fishery.

During the 1940's and 50's, CA Department of Fish and Game (CDFG) documents indicated that the general consensus among local biologists was that few Chinook inhabited the river, and those that did were the results of stocking activities. Chinook salmon were first stocked in the river in 1881, and stocking efforts continued sporadically until 1982, when CDFG began a serious, but largely unsuccessful effort to establish a run at the Warm Springs Fish Hatchery. Approximately 8 million fry and 5 million smolts were released from the hatchery between 1982 and 1996. Adult returns to the hatchery ranged between 0 and 304 fish during this time. CDFG ended its Chinook hatchery program in 1996.

Against the historical backdrop in 1999, we began studying fish populations in the Russian River with the general mindset that Chinook salmon were present in the basin at very low numbers. Surprisingly, the most abundant fish captured in our downstream migrant traps that year (and every year since) were juvenile Chinook salmon. This discovery ran counter to the historical documents that we had reviewed.

Our monitoring program consists of five interrelated studies assessing adult and juvenile salmonid passage around the Agency's inflatable dam, spawning habitat distribution, seasonal water temperature conditions in the study area, and predator populations above the dam. Here we report on the results of the upstream adult monitoring program and spawner surveys.

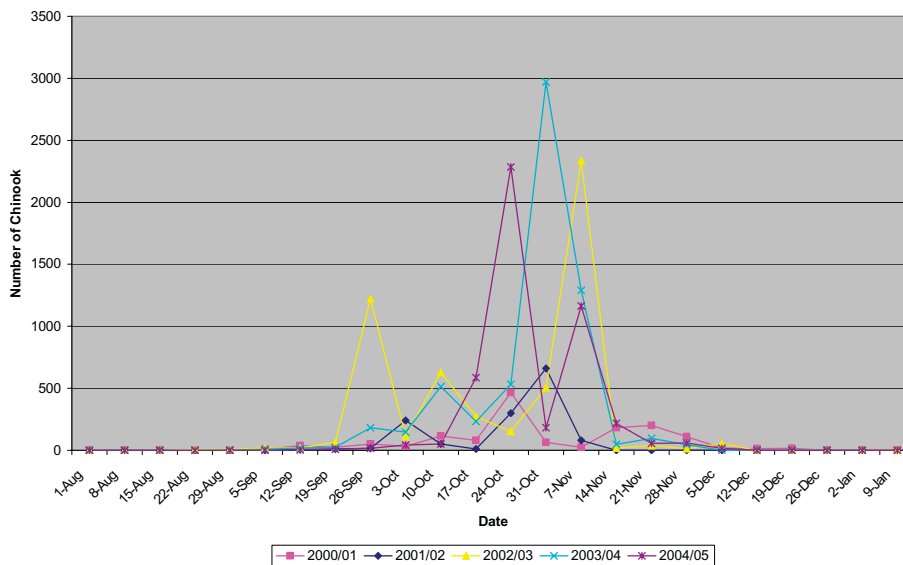
Adult fish passage is provided at the inflatable dam in the form of two Denil style fish ladders. Although the ladders have been in place since the dam was installed, their effectiveness had not been assessed. We installed a video system consisting of ultra-high resolution monochrome video cameras with wide-angle lenses housed in waterproof cases at the upstream end of each fish ladder. Images are recorded on two time-lapse videocassette recorders. The cameras are operated continuously 24 hours a day from at least mid-August until the dam was deflated (mid-November through mid-January, depending on the water year). Videotapes are reviewed on high quality VCRs having a wide range of slow motion and freeze frame capabilities. Video cameras have been operated from 1999 until the present.

The video cameras provide fairly high quality images under most flow conditions (see image, page 1). The image quality is significantly degraded during periods of high turbidity associated with rain events. Another factor limiting counts is the cameras are only operational when the dam is in place. The dam is deflated during high flow periods which have ranged from mid November to mid January, depending on rainfall patterns in the basin. In addition, some Chinook salmon spawning has been reported in tributaries located downstream of the dam. Thus the results of our video counts reflect a minimum number of Chinook salmon in the Russian River.

Annual counts of Chinook salmon have ranged from approximately 1,400 to 6,100 adult Chinook salmon (Table 1). It is too early to assess the 2005 run other than to say that fish are showing up in numbers similar to other years based on the time of the season. The adult run begins in late August, although relatively few fish are observed prior to October. Typically, the run peaks October through mid-November, and continues through the end of December.

*Continued on next page.*

## Chinook in River, continued from page 2



**Table 1.** Weekly counts of Chinook salmon observed migrating upstream through the Inflatable Dam fish passage facilities during video monitoring, 2000-2004 sampling seasons.

Date	2000/01	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05
1-Aug	0	0	0	--	0
8-Aug	0	0	0	--	0
15-Aug	0	0	1	--	0
22-Aug	1	0	8	--	0
29-Aug	0	3	7	2	1
5-Sep	9	1	18	7	1
12-Sep	38	7	19	20	3
19-Sep	23	12	65	23	8
26-Sep	50	17	1,223	181	16
3-Oct	31	240	113	146	42
10-Oct	115	51	628	515	51
17-Oct	81	10	272	232	585
24-Oct	466	300	153	532	2284
31-Oct	63	661	505	2969	183
7-Nov	24	81	2,337	1289	1164
14-Nov	182	--	20	47	217
21-Nov	200	--	37	95	57
28-Nov	111	--	14	45	59
5-Dec	19	--	54	--	15
12-Dec	14	--	--	--	--
19-Dec	17	--	--	--	--
26-Dec	1	--	--	--	--
2-Jan	0	--	--	--	--
9-Jan	0	--	--	--	--
<b>Totals</b>	<b>1,445</b>	<b>1,383</b>	<b>5,474</b>	<b>6,103</b>	<b>4,788</b>

Chinook salmon spawn primarily in the mainstem Russian River between Cloverdale and the confluence of the East and West forks, and in Dry Creek and its larger tributaries. Spawning has also been documented in several additional tributaries, including Austin, Green Valley, Santa Rosa, and Forsythe creeks, and in the West Fork of the Russian River.

An often-asked question is: why is it that when most salmon and steelhead populations are decreasing across their range that the Chinook salmon in the Russian River appear to be increased over historical populations? We truly have no satisfying explanation. One possibility is that the populations could have built up since the advent of the Potter Valley Project began discharging a stable flow into the river. The stable flow conditions during the fall months could have allowed the population to enter into the river each year and spawn. This sounds like a reasonable explanation except that these flows were present in the 1940's and 1950's when CDFG reports suggested that few Chinook inhabited the river. A second possibility is that access along the Russian is poor over a large section of the river, particularly during the 1940's and 1950's, and that the fish were just missed. It is true that there were no definitive studies conducted in the river to determine the presence or absence of Chinook salmon during this time period. While this is certainly plausible, the Russian River is (and was) a popular steelhead stream. Chinook are a large fish that would have been hard to miss by steelhead fisherman. A third possibility is that the current run of Chinook salmon are strays from other river systems or that they are remnants of the Warm Springs Fish Hatchery. However, genetics work conducted by the Bodega Bay Marine Lab reported that these fish are not related to populations in Central Valley rivers, the Eel River, or from the Warm Springs Hatchery.

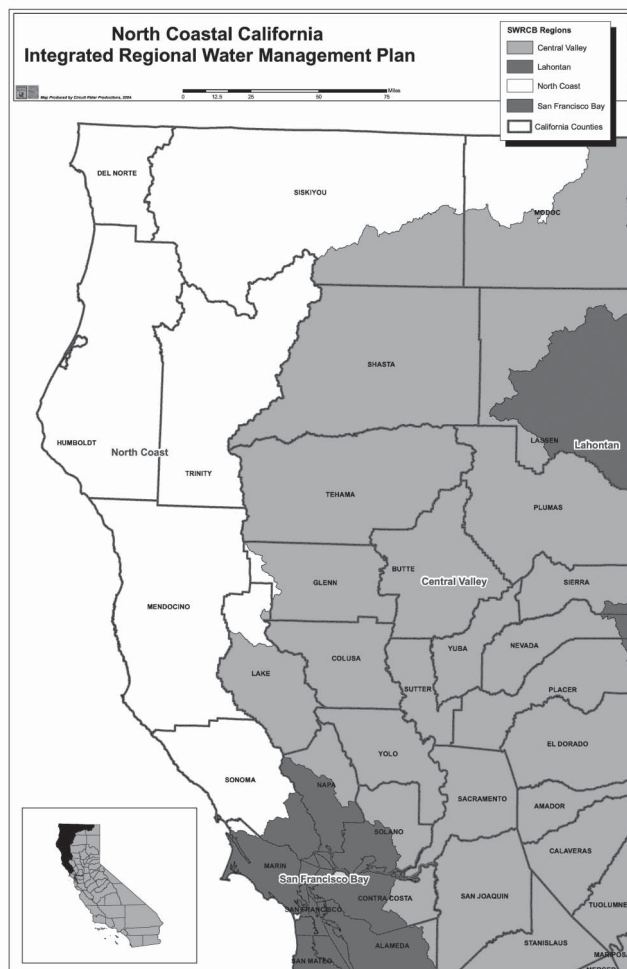
So, while many aspects of Chinook in the Russian remain unresolved, what we currently know is positive: the river currently supports a fairly large population of Chinook; and that these fish appear to be native to the river. We are hopeful that continued research will help us better understand these fish, and help with the recovery of this fishery.

*For updates on the Chinook counts for this season, please visit [www.sonomacountywater.org](http://www.sonomacountywater.org).*

# North Coast Region Vies for Proposition 50 Funds

In November 2002, California voters passed Proposition 50, the Water Security, Clean Drinking Water and Beach Protection Act of 2002. Chapter 8 of the bond act created a new grant program jointly administered by the Department of Water Resources (DWR) and State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB) appropriating \$380 million for the development of Integrated Regional Water Management (IRWM) plans and

the projects included within them. The grant program is intended to encourage integrated regional strategies for management of water resources and to provide funding for water supply reliability, clean water, water recycling, environmental restoration, fisheries protection, and watershed protection and planning projects.



Seeking to capture significant funding for the North Coast, the Regional Water Management Group for the North Coast Integrated Regional Water Management Plan (IRWMP), a consortium of cities, counties, tribes, non-governmental organizations, watershed groups and interested stakeholders from seven counties (Del Norte, Siskiyou, Modoc, Humboldt, Trinity, Mendocino and Sonoma), worked cooperatively to prepare Phase I of the North Coast IRWMP. Phase I is the first major milestone in an adaptive management process for the Region – one that establishes and implements an ongoing framework for regional evaluation, inter-jurisdictional planning and collaboration, and local project identification, prioritization, and implementation.

The North Coast IRWMP process institutionalizes the regional framework envisioned by the Legislature and provides a basis for mutual cooperation and implementation among North Coast counties. By relying upon the leadership of local elected officials, technical expertise from throughout the region, and a transparent, inclusive

stakeholder input process, the North Coast IRWMP reflects the necessary integration between watershed planning and local jurisdictional knowledge and oversight. The themes of Phase I of the North Coast IRWMP are interrelated and relevant at both local and regional scales and include:

- Protecting and enhancing the beneficial uses of water;
- Protecting and restoring salmonid populations; and
- Developing and maintaining intra-regional cooperation.

In May 2005, the County of Humboldt submitted a planning grant application on behalf of the Region to enhance Phase I of the North Coast IRWMP. The grant would support additional local and regional data development, data sharing, analyses, project identification, and the development of templates and model processes to coordinate local planning efforts with statewide criteria and goals. Additionally, North Coast IRWMP partners with planning needs in Areas of Special Biological Significance submitted applications for Integrated Coastal Watershed Management (ICWM) funding. In September, DWR and SWRCB announced their funding recommendations for planning grants in both of these categories. The North Coast IRWM application and ICWM applications submitted by the City of Trinidad, Mattole Restoration Council, Mendocino Resource Conservation District, and the Mendocino County Water Agency are all recommend-

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### *Proposition 50 Funds, continued from page 4*

ed for funding at the requested levels, potentially bringing more than \$1.7 million in water management planning dollars to the North Coast Region.

In July 2005, the North Coast Region submitted an application requesting \$50 million in available grant funding to implement priority projects identified in the North Coast IRWMP. Russian River watershed projects on this list total more than \$15 million of the total request for the seven county Region and meet North Coast IRWMP objectives of salmonid conservation, enhancement, and the protection of drinking water quality, while ensuring an adequate water supply and addressing environmental justice concerns. Applicants will be notified by the end of 2005 if they are invited to submit a full proposal for Step 2 of the implementation process. Grant awards would likely be made in the summer of 2006.

The second IRWM funding cycle will have \$220 million available for grants and is anticipated to begin in fall/winter of 2006. Additionally, Senator Chesbro recently included \$200 million for statewide IRWM program funding in his Resources Bond Initiative (SB 153) to be considered by the Legislature in January. Regardless of the North Coast's ability to garner funding, the Region is gaining a clearer picture of its needs and water-related priorities, making good progress on a management plan for the Region's water resources, and developing a stronger voice on statewide water policy issues.

For more information regarding the North Coast's integrated regional water management planning effort please visit [www.northcoastirwmp.net](http://www.northcoastirwmp.net).

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## **What is the Russian River Watershed Council Up to?**

**By: Michelle LeBeau, Watershed Coordinator, RRWC**

The Russian River Watershed Council (RRWC), established in 1998, was originally created under the auspices of the Army Corps of Engineers and the State Resources Agency to provide stakeholder input to the Army Corps of Engineers throughout the development of a watershed management plan for the Russian River. Our mission is to protect, restore, and enhance the biological health of the Russian River and its watershed through a community-based process, which facilitates communication and collaboration among all interested parties.

Over the last 6 years, our special partnership with the Army Corps of Engineers has provided an avenue for interested stakeholders to play a role in watershed management decisions. We have also produced several impressive products through collaborative partnerships, including the Plan of Action, Watershed Management Plan Scope of Work, and Russian River Interactive Information System.

Now, in 2005, the success in achieving our original mission with the Army Corp of Engineers has brought us to our next stage of organizational development. While we will maintain a meeting ground for diverse stakeholders and a forum for community involvement in the development of the management plan, we are refocusing our efforts in order to play a more active role in watershed protection and restoration.

With recent success in securing funding to support our new organizational direction we will be focusing on capacity building and a public outreach campaign. The capacity building project will supply the necessary organizational development assistance to transition from an advisory body to a self-sustaining, staffed organization with clear organizational direction and capacity to better enhance the Russian River watershed. The development and implementation of a public outreach campaign will utilize multiple approaches to more closely link the community with their watershed.

This is an exciting time for the Russian River Watershed Council and our watershed. We invite you to stay involved. For more information on upcoming meetings, events, or progress on our projects please visit us on the web at [www.RRWC.net](http://www.RRWC.net).

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# Ludwigia Control in the Laguna de Santa Rosa: Year One Field Report

By: Julian Meisler, Restoration Project Manager, Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation

The channels and wetlands of the Laguna de Santa Rosa are suffering a severe invasion by the non-native aquatic plant, Ludwigia. While the source of the invasion is unknown, this plant is still sold in nurseries, so it likely escaped from a backyard pond. Ludwigia's success seems to be related to its preference to the large areas of slow moving, shallow and nutrient rich waters found in the Laguna.

In 2003 the Laguna Foundation convened an advisory committee, the Ludwigia Task Force, to address the issue and this group ultimately developed the Ludwigia Control Plan (LCP). The LCP provides plans and recommendations for both short and long-term control. Over the long term, the goal is to treat the root causes of the invasion with efforts to increase shading and reduce nutrient and sediment loading. In the short term, a three-year control effort using a combination of herbicide



Cookie cutter clears path through densely choked channel (*Julian Meisler*)

followed by mechanical removal will target some of the most densely infested areas including roughly 25 acres of channels near Rohnert Park and 130 acres of channel and marsh north of Sebastopol. In these areas, owned by the Sonoma County Water Agency and the California Department of Fish and Game respectively, the goal is not to eradicate this highly persistent plant but rather to reduce the Ludwigia to a manageable level.

Year One control efforts began in mid-July, coordinated by the Laguna Foundation with Clean Lakes Inc. acting as the contractor. Given the variability in water depth, channel width and accessibility, Clean Lakes used a variety of equipment to apply a glyphosate-based herbicide – including an airboat, trucks, backpack sprayers and a swamp cat

(similar to snow cats used in ski areas but specially equipped to travel in shallow water).

After the herbicide was given sufficient time to work, our next task was to attempt removal of nearly 9,000 tons of biomass. Several methods were employed to meet the variable conditions. In narrow, accessible channels we used long reach excavators to simply scoop the material out. In wider channels where the water was deep enough, we used aquatic harvesters that cut and gathered the Ludwigia for delivery on shore. The resulting material was formed into giant windrows, now in the process of composting. Truckloads of accumulated trash had to be separated from these piles and hauled to the dump. The water levels this year were too shallow in some of the marshy areas to allow access by aquatic harvesters, although it was too wet for terrestrial equipment such as tractors. In these cases, the material was left in place to reduce habitat disturbance.

All in all, we made great progress this year toward reducing Ludwigia to a manageable level. We removed thousands of tons of biomass and learned a great deal in the process. Some of the problems encountered included incomplete kill and inability to remove biomass from select areas. All of these lessons will be incorporated into a plan for next year. Ultimately, only long-term restoration-based solutions will address the Ludwigia problem, and these will require a community-wide effort. Without this

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## *Ludwigia Control, continued from page 6*

short-term control effort, however, even the best long-term solutions will meet with limited success.

For more information on this project please contact Julian Meisler at [julian@lagunafoundation.org](mailto:julian@lagunafoundation.org) or visit our website at [www.lagunafoundation.org/RMP/Ludwigia/default.htm](http://www.lagunafoundation.org/RMP/Ludwigia/default.htm)



Before Ludwigia removal (left, taken July 2005), and after (right, taken October 2005). Photos were taken from Stony Point bridge looking west. (*Julian Meisler*)

## **Watershed Stewardship Award Winners**

The Russian River watershed is lucky to have people who are actively working to improve our watershed. The Russian River Watershed Council recently honored several good stewards at the first annual Watershed Stewardship Celebration.

Rudolph Light received the John Wesley Powell Stewardship award for multiple improvement projects on the Light Ranch in Redwood Valley including riparian fencing, riparian restoration, sediment reduction on roads and native upland plantings through a collaborative partnership.

Karen Rippey of the Army Corps of Engineers received the Agency award in recognition of their long-term partnership and continued support for the Russian River Watershed Council.

Brenda Adelman was honored for her lifetime commitment to improving the health of the watershed and providing leadership that has had a lasting effect, by receiving the Lifetime Achievement award.



Brenda Adelman (center) receiving her award.

Kay McCabe received the Mover of the Mover & Shaker award for taking an active role in water resource protection and working to connect the general public with their watershed.

Brock Dolman was recognized for his success in taking political action to ensure the protection and restoration of the Russian River watershed, by receiving the Shaker of the Mover & Shaker award.

Congratulations to the 2005 Stewardship Award winners and keep up the good work!

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# Editorial: Thoughts on Ludwigia in the Russian River

By: Keenan Foster, Senior Environmental Specialist (Botany), Sonoma County Water Agency

As weed watchers are well aware, we have an exotic member of the Evening Primrose Family (Onagraceae), *Ludwigia* sp. in the Russian River Watershed. Most recently a concerted effort has been made in the Laguna de Santa Rosa to remove large expanses of the plant near Rohnert Park and Cotati in the Upper Laguna de Santa Rosa channel and Bellevue-Wilfred flood control channels, and from a wildlife preserve managed by the California Department of Fish and Game near Sebastopol. The first year of this reduction effort is described on page 6 of this issue of the Russian River Bulletin.

The *Ludwigia* genus contains some 82 species worldwide with some 30 to 35 species occurring in North America. The Jepson Manual: Higher Plants of California (1993) identifies 5 species in California, two of which are considered non-native (*Ludwigia hexapetala* and *L. peploides montevidensis*). The genus is large and considered difficult taxonomically and contains many polyploidal taxa. Polyploids are organisms with multiple sets of chromosomes. In plants, having multiple sets of chromo-

somes can increase the rate of speciation and allow the expression of selectively advantageous genes. Our plant may actually be a hybrid or an entirely different species. *L. hexapetala* is reported to have been introduced into the watershed in the 1980's. However, given the confusing taxonomy of our specimens it could easily have been around and identified as a native for some time. Weeds often colonize an area and don't start aggressively invading until some unknown trigger causes it's proliferation. Some ecologists theorize that a taxon spends time sorting out it's genome, fine tuning



ing the expression of genes that give the species selective advantages, and when some threshold is reached the weed will start expanding aggressively into suitable habitat. Have we reached that explosive point in the Russian River Watershed with *Ludwigia*? It seems so. While apparently limited in extent by scouring flows, water depth, and shading, the plant is being observed in new locations where it was not previously recorded. But before we declare an all-out war against the plant, let's pause for a moment and consider what we know and what we still need to know before we commit.

It is tempting to ascribe numerous negative traits to the plant based on where it currently occurs and how fast it seems to have spread in these locations. We should be careful about assuming that this plant is an aggressive invader capable of over-running native wetland species until studies have been completed that show this to be true. While the plant is certainly capable of establishing itself in suitable habitat as an understory to willows, it remains to be seen if the species can overrun willow scrub habitat, or smother other robust wetland species such as tule, cattails, or larger rushes and sedges.

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Studies need to be conducted that quantify this species' interaction in an established native habitat as well as in disturbed wetland areas.

There are a number of additional questions that should be answered to help in developing fruitful long-term management solutions. What were the factors that caused the proliferation of the plant in the two problem areas in the Laguna de Santa Rosa? Did the plant simply invade an undisturbed native habitat or were these areas previously disturbed by fluctuating water levels, agriculture, or channel maintenance projects?



What natural controls exist for the proliferation of this plant? Do we have native diseases, pests or herbivores that could help control the distribution and extent of this plant? How effective is the species at reproducing from seed versus clonal fragments of the plant? It seems at first glance that the plant primarily spreads from fragments, yet it produces prodigious quantities of seed. How viable is this method of reproduction in our watershed? What conditions are needed to stimulate germination? Can the plant occupy a wider habitat niche than the native version (tolerate both wetter and drier conditions)? As the plant is of tropical origin, what is the effect of freezing weather? Every ten years or so Sonoma County experiences a cold snap with daytime temperatures reaching highs in the 20's. Last time this happened was in the early 1990's. Is today's problem a result of 10 to 15 years of relatively mild winters? Shade seems to discourage the proliferation of the plant. How tolerant of shade is this species? Is the plant a problem in riparian situations where there is a mature tree canopy? More information regarding these questions would help inform when, where and how control measures should be taken.

Along the mainstem Russian River, there are varying reports regarding the spread of *Ludwigia*. It is important to remember that unlike the situation in the Laguna de Santa Rosa, the mainstem experiences very high scouring flows every year that break the perennial plant off at its roots, or wash the whole plant out to sea. Another consequence is to move *Ludwigia* root masses from one gravel bar to another. Overall, this hydrological regime has the effect of setting the aerial (or floating) portions of the plant back to zero (or close to it) every spring. In contrast, in the Laguna de Santa Rosa, especially where we observe *Ludwigia* problems, flows are relatively sluggish and never reach the kind of velocities needed to break off the aerial portions of the plant. The result in the Laguna de Santa Rosa was that the previous years growth did not die or break off and new growth would just sprout from the old stems. After successive years the plant built up a twisted mass of stems that reached from bank to bank and filled the water column in the worst affected areas. This dynamic and the longevity of the species can have a dramatic effect on water quality and should be studied. The extent and spread of *Ludwigia* should be closely evaluated along the mainstem as well as larger tributaries to quantify if and how fast it proliferates.

We need to remember that there is a native *Ludwigia* (*Ludwigia peploides peploides*) in the watershed that while seemingly not as robust, behaves in a similar way, occupies almost the same niche, and apparently has caused quite a weed problem in French waterways (although given the group we are

*Continued on page 10.*

dealing with it's not inconceivable that the taxonomy of the European invader may also be enigmatic). Both the native and the invader can provide excellent nursery habitat for native warmer water Russian River fish species. The definition of a weed is very subjective and really comes down to the opinions of those naming it as such. Even the most well behaved plant under the right conditions could be an issue. While not all the time, many weed issues are simply symptoms of larger problems. Natural systems have a way of resetting themselves after becoming imbalanced. If it's not *Ludwigia* proliferating in nutrient-rich warm shallow water habitat in the Russian River watershed, what else will take advantage of the situation? What are the implications of these other species? Where we can we should address the cause and not the symptom. Long-term management solutions that address these questions and present an adaptive approach seem the most appropriate. The Laguna Foundation is implementing an adaptive strategy to control *Ludwigia* in the Laguna de Santa Rosa in the short term as well as preparing a Laguna Ecosystem Restoration and Management Plan that will address more long-term solutions. The Foundation is working with United States Department of Agriculture weed researchers to answer some of the questions posed here and to direct management of this species in the most effective way. Stay tuned, the *Ludwigia* question is far from answered.

## **RRIS - The Russian River Interactive Information System**

The Russian River Interactive Information System website is an educational tool and interactive communication forum for enhancing community watershed improvement efforts. RRIS is continuously updated with information specific to the Russian River Watershed including scientific data, community involvement opportunities, and management plans. RRIS is a publicly accessible resource for scientists, agencies, educators, watershed residents, the Russian River Watershed Council, and local watershed groups. Major components of RRIS include:

Communication Manager - Groups can keep their members informed of new information via automatic email notification, and control who has access to documents with the built-in user/group permissions system.

Digital Library - The digital library is a dynamic resource of watershed-related information. Site users can search for and retrieve documents, and authorized users can upload digital files for their group or for the entire RRIS community.

Calendar Tool - Online calendar allows users and groups to post, track, and stay informed of public and group events. Built-in email RSVP feature allows for easy notification of participants.

Online Mapping Tool - Interactive ArcIMS-based mapping tool provides easy custom viewing of the watershed's GIS data layers.

RRIS was developed in partnership with the Army Corps of Engineers, California Resources Agency and Development Team, Circuit Rider Productions, Inc., University of California Integrated Hardwoods Range Management Program, and Moore Iacogano Goltsman, Inc.

Check out RRIS at [www.RussianRiverWatershed.net](http://www.RussianRiverWatershed.net)



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# USDA Announces Conservation Planning Initiative for Russian River Landowners

**By: Kara Heckert, Soil Conservationist, Natural Resource Conservation Service**

The Russian River Watershed was selected by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) for a Conservation Planning Pilot Project, a national initiative intended to accelerate and expand planning for natural resource enhancement on private lands.

The Planning Pilot is a voluntary conservation initiative that encourages stewardship planning and outlines improvements on both agricultural and non-agricultural lands. The project focuses on working collaboratively with local landowners to develop detailed Natural Resource Management Plans for the lands they manage or own. Landowners who apply for the Planning Pilot will be provided with a self-assessment workbook and one-on-one assistance from NRCS technical staff in completing a comprehensive Conservation Plan.

Conservation Plans are considered private by the NRCS and the information they contain cannot be released to the public or other agencies under the rules of the 2002 Farm Bill. Individual landowners may, however, use this information in any way they choose. Having a completed Conservation Plan will not only help landowners make sound land management decisions, it may also assist landowners in complying with environmental regulations and participating in one or more USDA cost-share and incentive programs. "With the expansion of the 2002 Farm Bill, much staff time has been devoted to 'signing-up' landowners for programs," said Stephen Smith, District Conservationist for NRCS in Ukiah. "The Pilot Project will instead focus efforts on the planning process and devote more time to landowners who are interested in comprehensive treatments and improvements of their land." Once a plan is completed, NRCS can direct the participant to the best USDA program available for plan implementation. In fact, some NRCS field offices are giving funding priority to landowners who have a completed Conservation Plan.



A local informational workshop co-sponsored by the Sotoyome and Mendocino County Resource Conservation Districts will be held for potential applicants covering both the NRCS Planning Process and existing USDA cost-share programs like the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) and the Conservation Security Program (CSP). Two workshops will be held in Sonoma and Mendocino Counties. The Sonoma County workshop will be held November 8th from 2:00 to 4:00 pm, at the Sonoma County Farm Bureau at 970 Piner Road, Santa Rosa. The Mendocino County workshop will be held on November 3rd from 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. at the Mendocino County Farm Bureau at 303 C Talmage Road in Ukiah.

For more information, please contact Kara Heckert - [Kara.Heckert@ca.usda.gov](mailto:Kara.Heckert@ca.usda.gov) or (707) 569-9714.



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